

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-10 LAB-04  
NSAE-00 SIL-01 IO-13 /049 W  
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R 051045Z MAY 78  
FM USMISSION USBERLIN  
TO AMEMBASSY BONN  
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 6778  
AMEMBASSY BERLIN  
AMCONSUL BREMEN  
AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF  
AMCONSUL FRANKFURT  
AMCONCUL HAMBURG  
AMCONSUL MUNICH  
AMCONSUL STUTTGART

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 USBERLIN 1071

DEPT PASS TO DEPT OF LABOR

E.O.11652: GDS  
TAGS: ELAB, WB  
SUBJECT: MAY DAY 1978 IN BERLIN (WEST)

REF: USBERLIN A-24

SUMMARY: WEST BERLIN'S MAJOR TRADE UNIONS RESUMED PARCTICE OF  
OPEN-AIR MASS RALLY FOR FIRST TIME IN THREE YEARS. ALTHOUGH  
THE RALLY WAS SUCCESSFUL IN TERMS OF TURNOUT, BERLIN'S DGB  
LEADERSHIP WAS EMBARRASSED BY COMMUNIST AGITATORS WHO INFILTRATED  
DEMONSTRATION IN SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS AND SHOUTED DOWN BERLIN  
DGB CHAIRMAN SICKERT. END SUMMARY.

1. BERLIN TRADE UNION FEDERATION - DGB - HELD ITS MAY DAY  
CELEBRATION IN THE JOHN F. KENNEDY PLATZ AT RATHAUS SCHOENEBERG  
THIS YEAR, RESUMING THE PRACTICE OF HOLDING AN OPEN-AIR RALLY  
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AFTER AN INTERRUPTION OF THREE YEARS. LAST YEAR, BERLIN'S  
DGB PUT ON A SMALL INDOOR ENTERTAINMENT EVENING TO MARK  
MAY DAY AND WAS SEVERELY CRITICIZED FOR ITS EFFORT. IN  
1976 AN EFFORT TO HOLD AN OUTDOOR RALLY IN AN ENCLOSED  
FAIRGROUND SO THAT COMMUNIST HECKLERS AND AGITATORS  
COULD BE SCREENED OUT TURNED INTO A TOTAL FIASCO WHEN  
KBW AND SEW DEMONSTRATORS BLOCKED THE FAIRGROUND ENTRANCES,

THEREBY KEEPING DGB MEMBERS OUT OF RALLY AREA. THIS YEAR'S MAY DAY RALLY FOLLOWED A MORE TRADITIONAL FORMAT. MARCHING COLUMNS REPRESENTING THE PUBLIC SERVICE AND TRANSPORT WORKERS UNION (OETV), CONSTRUCTION WORKERS (BSE), METAL WORKERS (IGM) AND PRINTERS UNION (IG DRUECK) CONVERGED ON JOHN F. KENNEDY PLATZ FROM SEVERAL DIRECTIONS. THEY WERE JOINED BY UNOFFICIAL COLUMNS MADE UP OF THE EXPELLED TEACHERS' UNION (GEW) AND THOUSANDS OF MEMBERS OF THE KBW AND SEW WHO MINGLED IN WITH THE REGULAR DGB COLUMNS.

2. APPROXIMATELY 90 PERCENT OF THE 25,000 RALLY PARTICIPANTS WERE UNDER THE AGE OF 30. THEY REMAINED ORDERLY AND GENERALLY ATTENTIVE THROUGHOUT SPEECHES BY REPRESENTATIVES OF THE BANKING AND INSURANCE UNION (HBV), THE BERLIN CITY SANITATION DEPARTMENT (BSR), AND BERLIN PRINTERS UNION. THE ONLY ROUND OF SUSTAINED APPLAUSE DURING THE FIRST 45 MINUTES OF THE RALLY CAME IN RESPONSE TO ONE UNION LEADER'S STATEMENT THAT THE DGB FIRMLY

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AMCONSUL STUTTGART

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 USBERLIN 1071

DEPT PASS TO DEPT OF LABOR

OPPOSED THE PRODUCTION OR DEPLOYMENT OF THE NEUTRON BOMB. CONSIDERABLE DISORDER BROKE OUT, HOWEVER, WHEN BERLIN DGB CHAIRMAN WALTER SICKERT ATTEMPTED TO DELIVER THE CLOSING REMARKS AT THE RALLY. SICKERT HAD BARELY SPOKEN HIS FIRST SENTENCE ("WE, TOO, DEMAND FREEDOM FOR BAHRO."), WHEN THE CATCALLS, WHISTLES, BOOS AND A WHOLE SERIES OF OFFENSIVE AND OBSCENE CHANTS ROSE FROM ABOUT A DOZEN WELL-ORGANIZED KBW AND SEW CLAQUES SITUATED THROUGHOUT THE CROWD. ESTIMATES AS TO THE NUMBER OF KBW AND SEW PARTICIPANTS RANGED FROM BETWEEN ONE FIFTH TO ONE HALF OF THE PARTICIPANTS. THE REMAINING RALLY PARTICIPANTS WATCHED AND LISTENED TO THE HECKLERS WITH UNEASY BEWILDERMENT, BUT NONE SOUGHT TO SILENCE THEM. THE JEERING KEPT UP THROUGHOUT SICKERT'S SPEECH WHICH  
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ENDED WITH THE RINGING OF THE FREEDOM BELL FROM THE TOP OF RATHAUS SCHOENEBERG. SICKERT HIMSELF BARELY AVOIDED BEING HIT BY A PAINT-FILLED BALLON WHICH SAILED OVER HIS HEAD AND SPATTERED THE PODIUM DIRECTLY BEHIND HIM MIDWAY THROUGH HIS SPEECH. SICKERT CLAIMED HE HAD EXPECTED THE HOSTILE RECEPTION, BUT IT APPEARED TO MISSION OFFICER WHO SPOKE WITH SICKERT AFTER THE RALLY THAT HE HAD SUFFERED CONSIDERABLY MORE FROM THE ENTIRE EXPERIENCE THAN HE WISHED TO LET ON.

3. AS REPORTED REPAIR, SICKERT'S POPULARITY IN THE BERLIN DGB CONTINUES TO DECLINE, PARTICULARLY AMONG THE UNIONS' YOUNGER MEMBERS. THIS YEAR'S MAY DAY EVENTS, WHICH WERE AN INTENSIFIED REPETITION OF THE EVENTS OF 1975 WHEN SICKERT HAD BEEN FAIRLY SEVERELY HECKLED BY INDIVIDUAL UNIONS, REPRESENTS A MAJOR PUBLIC DISPLAY OF SICKERT'S LOSS OF INFLUENCE. A FURTHER INDICATION OF SICKERT'S DECLINING STRENGTH IN BERLIN HAS BEEN EVIDENCED OUTSIDE OF THE FIELD OF LABOR. IN LOCAL SU-DISTRICT PARTY SELECTION PROCESS TO CHOOSE CANDIDATES FOR THE BERLIN HOUSE ELECTIONS NEXT YEAR, SICKERT WAS BADLY BEATEN BY A RELATIVELY UNKNOWN YOUNGER CANDIDATE. IT TOOK CONSIDERABLE EFFORT AND INTENSE PRESSURE FROM THE SPD'S MUELLER STASSE HEADQUARTERS TO FORCE ONE OF THE CANDIDATES IN SICKERT'S NEUKOELN ELECTORAL DISTRICT TO GIVE UP HIS SAFE SPOT ON THE DISTRICT LIST SO THAT THE DGB LEADER, THE ONLY TRADE UNION LEADER IN THE BERLIN HOUSE, COULD BE RE-ELECTED.

4. COMMENT: SICKERT'S FAILING STRENGTH AT THE POLITICAL GRASS ROOTS REFLECTS NOT ONLY HIS DECLINING INFLUENCE? BUT ALSO THE WIDENING GAP BETWEEN BERLIN'S TRADE UNIONS, IN PARTICULAR THE DGB, AND THE SPD. GEORGE  
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## Message Attributes

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**Disposition Date:** 20 Mar 2014  
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